

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUITO 03446 261342Z
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 L-03 IO-13 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07
INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 /046 W
-----270219Z 055091 /63
R 261200Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4455
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 3446

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT ELAB EC
SUBJ: GOE ADOPTING HARDER LINE TOWARD LABOR

REF: (A) QUITO 3403; (B) QUITO 3334; (C) QUITO 2913

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: FOLLOWING THE UNSUCCESSFUL STRIKE BY ECUADOR'S THREE NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATIONS MAY 18, GOE MINLABOR HAS VOWED TO TAKE ACTION TO BREAK UP THE CONFEDERATIONS. PRIMARY TEACHERS STRIKE BEGUN MAY 18 CONTINUES WITHOUT SOLUTION. GOE HAS MOVED TO REMOVE WORKERS OCCUPYING US-OWNED CIGARETTE FACTORY IN QUITO. RECENT GOE ACTIONS INDICATE THAT THE GOVERNMENT FEELS IN A STRONG POSITION VIS-A-VIS LABOR FOLLOWING FAILURE OF MAY 18 GENERAL STRIKE. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING MAY 20 ILO DEMARCHE (REFTEL A) ON LABOR MININSTER JORGE SALVADOR CHIRIBOGA BY AMBASSADOR AND LAB/POLOFF, SALVADOR CONFIDED THAT THE HAD TAKEN EXTRAORDINARY STEPS TO ASSURE THE FAILURE OF THE MAY 18 GENERAL STRIKE (REFTEL B) CARRIED OUT BY THE THREE NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATIONS. SALVADOR SAID HE HAD CARRIED OUT A "COUNTER-STRIKE" AIMED AT DIVIDING THE CONFEDERATIONS AND ADDED THAT IN FACT HE HAD LED THE CONFEDERATIONS ON TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE IN FACT STRONGER THAN THEY REALLY WERE SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT WITHDRAW FROM THE FORE-DOOMED STRIKE.

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3. NOW THAT THE STRIKE HAS FAILED THE MINISTER SAID THAT HE INTENDED TO DESTROY THE CURRENT CONFEDERATIONS AND RECONSTITUTE THEM IN THE FORM OF TRUE WORKER ORGANIZATIONS. SALVADOR SAID THAT MOST OF THE CONFEDERATIONS' OFFICERS HAD NEVER BEEN WORKERS A DAY IN THEIR LIVES AND THAT THEIR PRIME PURPOSES WERE POLITICAL. HE EXPRESSED INDIGNATION THAT THE CTE'S

(COMMUNIST PARTY LED) STATUTES MENTIONED THAT THE CONFEDERATION WAS ORGANIZED ALONG MARXIST-LENINIST PRINCIPLES. ACCORDING TO SALVADOR, HE INTENDS TO REORGANIZE THE CONFEDERATIONS ALONG NON-POLITICAL LINES. SUCH AN ACTION, SAID SALVADOR, WOULD NOT MAKE MARTYRS OUT OF THE FAILED LABOR LEADERS BUT WOULD IN FACT RETURN THE CONFEDERATIONS TO THEIR LEGITIMATE PURPOSES AND STRUCTURE.

4. CONSISTENT WITH SALVADOR'S HARDLINE APPROACH, THE GOE MOVED ON MAY 24 TO REMOVE STRIKING WORKERS WHO HAVE OCCUPIED QUITO'S TANASA CIGARETTE FACTORY SINCE APRIL 29 (SEE REFTEL C). EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED UNCONFIRMED REPORTS OF RESISTENCE TO THE POLICE ACTION AT TANASA WHICH RESULTED IN A NUMBER OF INJURIES. TANASA IS MAJORITY-OWNED BY PHILIP MORRIS. ALTHOUGH MANAGEMENT HAD REQUESTED THAT GOE TO REMOVE THE OCCUPYING WORKERS (AND STUDENTS) SHORTLY AFTER THE STRIKE BEGAN, THE GOE DELAYED ACTION, APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF A DESIRE TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION PRIOR TO THE ALREADY SCHEDULED MAY 18 NATIONAL STRIKE. FOLLOWING THE FAILURE OF THE STRIKE, THE GOE WOULD ENJOY AN ADVANTAGEOUS SITUATION VIS-A-VIS LABOR AND WAS ABLE TO ACT FIRMLY TO REMOVE THE WORKERS WITHOUT FEAR OF MAJOR REPERCUSSIONS.

5. LESS SUSCEPTIBLE TO SOLUTION BY STRONG-ARM METHODS IS THE NATIONAL TEACHERS STRIKE UNDERWAY SINCE MAY 18 AIMED AT RAISING PRIMARY TEACHERS' SALARIES TO THE LEVEL OF SECONDARY TEACHERS. THIS MATTER HAS BEEN UNDER CONSULTATION FROM SOME TIME AND THE GOE HAS PERSISTENTLY CLAIMED THAT FUNDS FOR THE RAISES ARE SIMPLY NOT NOW AVAILABLE. ESTIMATES ARE THAT
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BETWEEN 50 AND 75 PERCENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ARE CURRENTLY STRIKING, BUT VIRTUALLY ALL PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND MOST GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE OPERATING NORMALLY.

6. THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO REFUSE TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION SO LONG AS THE TEACHERS ARE STRIKING AND THE TEACHERS REFUSE TO RETURN TO WORK UNTIL THEIR DEMANDS ARE GRANTED. THE GOVERNMENT GAVE INTO THE TEACHERS QUICKLY DURING ECUADOR'S LAST TEACHERS'S STRIKE (LATE 1975) BUT THE GOE SEEMS DETERMINED TO WEATHER THIS ONE. UNE HAS PUBLISHED DECLARATIONS CLAIMING THAT THE GOE HAS SENT ARMED MEN TO ARREST THE STRIKE LEADERS, BUT THESE REPORTS REMAIN UNCONFIRMED.

7. COMMENT: IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR MINISTER OF LABOR SALVADOR APPEARED GENUINELY DETERMINED TO BREAK UP THE THREE NATIONAL CONFEDERATIONS (CTE, CEDOC AND CEOSL), BUT THE EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT SUCH A MOVE IS VERY LIKELY. THE GOE MAY HAVE THE STRENGTH TO CAUSE THE FAILURE OF A NATIONAL STRIKE OR TO REMOVE STRIKING WORKERS

FROM A FACTORY, BUT BREAKING UP OF THE CONFEDERATIONS COULD
CAUSE MASSIVE WORKER AND STUDENT RESISTANCE THAT COULD
THREATEN THE GOVERNMENT DURING THIS DELICATE TRANSITION
PERIOD. WE EXPECT COOLER HEADS TO PREVAIL.
BLOOMFIELD

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, LABOR STRIKES, STRIKE SETTLEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 26-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977QUITO03446
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770189-0547
Format: TEL
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770514/aaaaalvs.tel
Line Count: 121
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 72653289-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 QUITO 3403, 77 QUITO 3334, 77 QUITO 2913
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2355226
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOE ADOPTING HARDER LINE TOWARD LABOR
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, EC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/72653289-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009